

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-07 L-02

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FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1440

INFO USDEL JEC PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 SAIGON 15882

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SUBJ: PACM STATUS IN MR3

1. SUMMARY: THERE ARE VARYING DEGREES OF INTEREST IN FATHER
TRAN HUU THANH AND THE PEOPLE'S ANTI-CORRUPTION MOVEMENT
THROUGHOUT MR3, WITH LITTLE ACTIVE SUPPORT OUTSIDE OF THE GIA
DINH AND BIEN HOA METROPOLITAN AREAS. EVEN IN THESE AREAS,
ACTIVE SUPPORT IS GENERALLY LIMITED TO YOUTHFUL CATHOLICS.
OTHER RELIGIOUS GROUPS AND MOST PRIESTS HAVE ADOPTED A WAIT-
AND-SEE ATTITUDE, THOUGH THEY OFTEN EXPRESS SYMPATHY FOR THE
GOALS, IF NOT THE METHODS AND MAJOR FIGURES, OF THE MOVEMENT.
IT SEEMS APPARENT THAT IN MANY CASES THE PEOPLE WOULD BECOME
MORE ACTIVE IF THEIR PRIEST REQUESTED IT, BUT THE PRIESTS
SHOW NO SIGNS OF DOING SO AT THIS TIME. A NUMBER OF PRIESTS
HAVE COMMENTED THAT THEY SUSPECT THAT THE US IS PROVIDING
SUPPORT FOR PACM. END SUMMARY.

2. GIA DINH: PACM HAS MANAGED TO CAPTURE THE INTEREST, IF
NOT THE SUPPORT, OF MOST OF THE URBAN POPULATION OF GIA DINH
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PROVINCE, WHICH IS THE CENTER OF PACM INFLUENCE IN MR3. MOST

OF THE POPULACE IS SYMPATHETIC, BUT ACTIVE SUPPORT IS LIMITED TO YOUTHFUL CATHOLICS, MANY OF THEM ADOLESCENT OR PRE-ADOLESCENT. THE MOST ACTIVE SUPPORT IS LOCALIZED IN HEAVILY NORTH VIETNAMESE CATHOLIC TAN SON HOA VILLAGE. THE OLDER, MORE CONSERVATIVE PRIESTS ARE GENERALLY UNSYMPATHETIC TO PACM. OUR PROVINCE REP FEELS THAT PACM SUPPORT IN GIA DINH MAY HAVE PEAKED NOV 28, FOLLOWING FATHER THANH'S FAILURE TO MOUNT MASSIVE DEMONSTRATIONS.

3. BIEN HOA: THE MAJOR AREA OF SUPPORT FOR PACM IN BIEN HOA PROVINCE IS IN 11 PARISHES IN THE AREA OF BIEN HOA CITY. FATHER NGUYEN KHANG HY, RECTOR OF TAN MAI PARISH, IS THE PACM LEADER IN BIEN HOA. SOURCES IN BIEN HOA ESTIMATE THAT ONLY ABOUT 20 TO 30 PERCENT OF THE 30,000 CATHOLICS IN THE 11 PARISHES WOULD ACTIVELY SUPPORT PACM. WE UNDERSTAND THAT SOME OF THE 11 PARISH PRIESTS FEEL THEY HAVE LITTLE SUPPORT FROM THE PEOPLE AND ARE LOOKING FOR A WAY TO DISASSOCIATE THEMSELVES GRACEFULLY FROM THE MOVEMENT. THE PRINCIPAL RECTOR OF BIEN HOA, FATHER THOMAS NGUYEN VAN SUM, OPINES THAT AS PACM MOVES INTO THE POLITICAL ARENA, IT WILL LOSE SUPPORT BECAUSE THE PEOPLE FEEL THE CHURCH HAS NO PLACE IN POLITICS.

4. BINH TUY: WHILE THE PEOPLE OF BINH TUY ARE GENERALLY INTERESTED IN AND SYMPATHETIC TO PACM'S OBJECTIVES, THEY ARE NOT LIKELY TO SUPPORT PACM ACTIVELY WITHOUT LEADERSHIP. PRESENTLY THE PRIESTS AND MONKS ARE NOT GOING TO PROVIDE THIS LEADERSHIP, ACCORDING TO THE SENIOR PRIEST OF BINH TUY, BECAUSE THEY FEEL THE GOVT MUST HAVE A CHANCE TO IMPROVE. INDEED, A NUMBER OF LOW-RANKING MILITARY PERSONNEL AND CIVIL SERVANTS REPORT THAT SERVICES ARE IMPROVING AND CREDIT PACM FOR THIS. SEVERAL PRIESTS AND MONKS FEEL THAT THE US IS BEHIND PACM AND IS USING IT AS A MEANS TO OUST PRESIDENT THIEU.

5. LONG KHANH: EIGHTEEN OF THE 57 PRIESTS IN LONG KHANH WERE AMONG THE 301 PRIESTS TO SIGN THE DECLARATION AGAINST CORRUPTION. HOWEVER, ALL OF THEM CLAIM TO HAVE SIGNED IT TO SUPPORT PRESIDENT THIEU'S EFFORTS TO FIRE CORRUPT LEADERS AND NOT AS AN INDICATION OF SUPPORT FOR FATHER THANH. FATHER THANH HAS TRIED AND FAILED TO SEE BISHOP LANG (XUAN LOC), BUT THE BISHOP LATER SAW FATHER HOANG QUYEN, WHO LEADS THE RIVAL ANTI-CONFIDENTIAL

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SOCIAL EVILS MOVEMENT. SUPPORT FOR PACM AMONG THE PEOPLE APPEARS TO BE SLIGHT BUT THE PEOPLE WILL PROBABLY FOLLOW THEIR PRIESTS IF THEY CALL FOR DEMONSTRATIONS.

6. PHUOC LONG: BECAUSE OF PHUOC LONG'S ISOLATION AND THE FACT THAT MOST OF THE 55 TO 65 PERCENT NON-MONTAGNARD POPULATION IS DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY DEPENDENT ON THE GVN FOR IT'S LIVELIHOOD, THERE IS LITTLE SUPPORT FOR PACM. NONETHELESS

SEVERAL PHUOC LONG PRIESTS HAVE ESTABLISHED A COMMITTEE ON CORRESPONDENCE, AND A CATHOLIC ANTI-CORRUPTION COMMITTEE MADE UP OF PROMINENT PRIESTS AND LAYMEN IN THE AREA HAS BEEN FORMED. BOTH ARE INTENDED TO KEEP TABS ON CORRUPTION. THE PRIESTS FEEL THAT WHILE FATHER THANH'S PURPOSE IS COMMENDABLE, ACTIVE SUPPORT OR DEMONSTRATIONS WOULD HAVE NO TANGIBLE BENEFITS FOR THE PEOPLE OF PHUOC LONG THOUGH THE PEOPLE WOULD PROBABLY DEMONSTRATE AT THEIR BEHEST. THE PROVINCE REP FEELS THAT PACM MAY HAVE LOST SUPPORT WHEN IT BECAME MORE POLITICAL.

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7. PHUOC TUY: WHILE MOST OF THE PEOPLE OF PHUOC TUY ARE INTERESTED IN PACM, THERE IS LITTLE ACTIVE SUPPORT. MOST OF THE PRIESTS DO NOT AGREE WITH FATHER THANH'S METHODS. TWO PRIESTS, FATHER DOAN OF PHUOC TINH VILLAGE AND FATHER THANH OF PHUOC TIN VILLAGE, HAVE TRIED AND FAILED TO ORGANIZE DEMONSTRATIONS RECENTLY. (COMMENT: FATHER DOAN IS WIDELY REGARDED IN THE AREA AS HEAVILY ENGAGED IN SMUGGLING. END COMMENT) MOST OF THE PEOPLE IN VUNG TAU ALSO SYMPATHIZE WITH PACM'S OBJECTIVES. FATHER NGUYEN MINH TRI, THE PRINCIPAL RECTOR, SYMPATHIZES WITH FATHER THANH AND IS OUTSPOKEN IN CRITICIZING CORRUPTION, BUT FEELS HE CANNOT ACTIVELY SUPPORT PACM BECAUSE HE IS GODFATHER TO PRESIDENT THIEU'S BROTHER, NGUYEN VAN KIEU.

8. TAY NINH: ALTHOUGH ALL 11 PRIESTS IN TAY NINH SUPPORT FATHER THANH, THEY REALIZE THAT THEY ARE DEPENDENT ON THE GVN AND DO NOT WISH TO ALIENATE THE AUTHORITIES. ROMAN CATHOLICS ARE,

OF COURSE, IN A NOTABLY MINORITY POSITION IN THE PROVINCE. THE CAO DAI LEADERS HAVE BEAKEN A FIRM NEUTRAL POSITION IN ACCORDANCE WITH CHURCH DOCTRINE. THERE IS LITTLE INTEREST AMONG THE CAO DAI POPULATION.

9. LONG AN: THERE IS LITTLE INTEREST IN PACM IN LONG AN, AND NONE IS LIKELY TO DEVELOP, AT LEAST AS LONG AS FATHER THANH HEADS THE MOVEMENT. HE IS NOT CONSIDERED A CREDIBLE LEADER.

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10. HAU NGHIA: SUPPORT FOR PACM IN HAU NGHIA IS CHARACTERIZED BY THE FACT THAT WHEN FATHER THANH TRAVELED TO TAY NINH TO TALK TO THE CAO DAISSTS, HE DIDN'T STOP IN HAU NGHIA. THE PEOPLE ARE SYMPATHETIC WITH PACM OBJECTIVES, BUT MORE CONCERNED WITH SECURITY.

11. BINH DUONG: ACCORDING TO THE BISHOP OF PHU CUONG, THERE IS INTEREST IN PACM BUT NO ACTIVE SUPPORT FOR THE MOVEMENT. THE PRELATE OF LAI THIEU HAS EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT PACM MAY BECOME COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE BY CAUSING THE US TO BECOME DISGUSTED AND CUT AID TO VIETNAM.

12. IN LONG KHANH AND BINH TUY PROVINCES, WE FOUND CONSIDERABLE ANTI-US SENTIMENT ASSOCIATED WITH ATTITUDES TOWARD PACM. THESE FEELINGS RANGED FROM THE ERRONEOUS PUBLIC BELIEF FOUND ELSEWHERE THAT PACM HAD US SUPPORT TO MORE SCURRILOUS CHARGES CONCERNING AMERICAN ACTIVITY VIS-A-VIS THE CATHOLICS. MOST PRIESTS AND MONKS CONTACTED IN THE TWO PROVINCES EXPRESSED A BELIEF THAT THE USG SUPPORTS PACM, MORE SPECIFICALLY THAT THE CIA IS SUPPORTING PACM IN A MOVE TO OUST PRESIDENT THIEU. FATHER HOA, SENIOR PRIEST IN BINH TUY, COMMENTED "PERHAPS" THE AMERICANS KNOW MORE ABOUT PACM THAN I". MANY WHO OPPOSE PACM RELATE THIS ACCUSATION TO AN ASSERTION THAT THE US IS GETTING OUT OF VIETNAM WITHOUT FINISHING THE JOB, AND THEREFORE BLAME THE US FOR THE PROBLEMS FACING THE GVN, INCLUDING THE MOVEMENT. FATHER DIEM, A PREIST IN PHUOC THUAN HAMLET, SAID THAT THE ONLY THING THAT WOULD BRING AMERICANS BACK TO VIETNAM WOULD BE OIL. HE WENT ON TO SAY THAT AMERICANS WERE FAR TOO CLEVER TO ALLOW THE OIL TO BE PROCESSED IN VIETNAM, BUT WOULD INSTEAD TRANSPORT IT DIRECTLY TO THE US. THE MOST SCURRILOUS CHARGES AGAINST AMERICANS WERE MADE BY A PRIEST IN LE LOI HAMLET. HE ASSERTED TO A MEETING OF HIS PARISH COUNCIL RECENTLY THAT AMERICANS ARE BRIBING CATHOLICS TO TAKE A STRONG POSITION AGAINST THE GVN AND WILL CRUSH THEM AFTER THEY ARE NO LONGER USEFUL. ONE WAY IN WHICH THE US WILL BREAK CATHOLIC POWER, HE SAID, WILL BE "TO ORDER" THE GVN TO BUILD PUBLIC SCHOOLS CLOSE TO CATHOLIC SCHOOLS TO STEAL THEIR STUDENTS. (COMMENT: WHILE BINH TUY AND LONG KHANH WERE THE ONLY TWO PROVINCES IN WHICH ANY ANTI-

AMERICAN FEELING WAS EXPRESSED, IT WOULD BE NAIVE TO ASSUME
THAT IT DOES NOT EXIST ELSEWHERE. END COMMENT) PETERS UNQUOTE
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